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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PRISTINA 000509

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO - GETTING KFOR DRAWDOWN RIGHT

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[1](#)B. USMISSION USNATO 409

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: KFOR is close to completing the first phase of its ultimate drawdown to "deterrent presence" force of 2,500 troops. By February 2010, KFOR troop levels will decline to 10,000, so-called Gate 1 in KFOR's three-phase plan. We believe that the Gate 1 decision was justified, but are concerned about what might be a rush among some KFOR elements to move to Gate 2 (5,000 troops)) a decision some of have suggested could come as early as April 2010. These intimations appear to be premised upon two questionable assumptions. First, the lack of any significant calls for KFOR to intervene is cited as evidence that conditions on the ground are already sufficient to ensure Kosovo's long-term stability and security. Second, that KFOR can not only meet quickly the remaining nine conditions required to recommend to the North Atlantic Council (NAC) a move to deterrent presence, but do so in a way that addresses the underlying issues and conditions. Our concern is that the first assumption mistakes the absence of a security incident for successful creation of the conditions necessary for drawdown. The latter requires dealing with problems critical to Kosovo's long-term stability and security, notably the reintegration of the North, the resolution of which we have postponed because of the associated security risks. In our judgment, we must address these challenges while KFOR retains a robust presence (i.e., before a decision to move to Gate 2), but we sense an increasing reluctance on KFOR's part to do so precisely because they do not want to "put at risk" an early decision to move to Gate 2. The second assumption is plausible only if difficult political and capacity issues associated with the nine conditions are tackled head on. The thoughtful transfer of KFOR tasks to capable replacements will require EULEX to assume greater responsibility and risk than it has thus far been willing to assume. Finally, it will require a more concerted effort by the international community to build the capacity of local security forces, including a reassessment of the Kosovo Security Forces' future. If the desire for speed trumps tackling serious issues, we risk a premature drawdown that puts our long-term goals for Kosovo and the region at risk. END SUMMARY

Conditions vs. Calendar

¶2. (C/NF) In June, the NAC agreed that a low-threat security environment in Kosovo would allow KFOR to begin drawing down its forces. The first phase of KFOR's three-phase drawdown is already well underway, and we expect KFOR troop levels to reach 10,000 -- so-called Gate 1 -- by the end of January ¶2010. KFOR is now focused on fulfilling nine conditions required to begin the next phase of the drawdown. The nine conditions are: 1) KFOR prepared to unfix from static tasks; 2) Situational awareness established; 3) Liaison and cooperation with International Civilian Presences (ICP) established; 4) Out of theater reinforcement established and demonstrated; 5) Military Information Campaign established; 6) Threat to stable and secure environment (SASE) contained and assessed as Low; 7) ICP Rule-of-Law Mission functioning Kosovo-wide; 8) Framework Tasks reduced; and 9) Institutions in Kosovo accept responsibility for own security. Some within KFOR have suggested to us that a decision to drawdown to Gate 2 (i.e., 5,000) could be taken as early as April ¶2010. Though not mentioned in any briefing slides, some within KFOR tell us that they want to begin presenting Gate 2-related issues to the NAC on/about February 1. This strikes us as unrealistic and raises questions in our minds about whether conditions or a calendar are driving KFOR's plans.

Unfinished Business

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¶3. (C/NF) KFOR likes to cite the relative calm since March 2008, the last time KFOR was called upon to address a deteriorating security situation, as evidence that the political conditions exist for long-term security and stability in Kosovo. By extension, it is implied, this justifies rapid movement towards deterrent presence. This logic discounts or ignores the connection between KFOR's large presence and the current low threat to a SASE. It also discounts the fact that the international community has postponed addressing some of the most contentious and intractable issues in Kosovo, issues that have a direct bearing on Kosovo's long-term stability and security. The decision to postpone was often rooted in a thoughtful weighing of the immediate security risks associated with action against the potential damage to a broader strategic objective, such as getting to independence, or minimizing risks in the immediate aftermath of independence. Each of the decisions made sense at the time, but the root challenges are still out there. The reduction of KFOR troops before they are addressed would leave us and our international partners in the unenviable position of facing these problems with even fewer tools at our disposal.

The North: Getting It Right Requires KFOR

¶4. (C/NF) The most intractable of the challenges we face relate to the three Serb-majority northern municipalities in Kosovo and north Mitrovica, which has a direct bearing on Kosovo's and the region's long-term security and stability. The area remains dominated by parallel structures, which have taken a number of steps to undermine Kosovo's sovereignty in the north, including burning customs facilities at Gates 1 and 31, taking over the courthouse in north Mitrovica, organizing parallel municipal elections, and most recently, taking steps that appear to be aimed at separating the north's electrical grid from Kosovo (Ref A). Kosovo Serbs north of the Ibar, even the more "moderate" post-Tadic figures who have assumed greater leadership there in recent months, remain firm in rejecting Kosovo's independence and continue to refuse to work directly with Kosovo institutions.

15. (C/NF) There is little appreciation among our European colleagues of the risks associated with allowing the north to continue to chip away at Kosovo's sovereignty, though there is a growing recognition for the need to take a more pro-active approach to the region. Belgrade will likely continue to limit prospects for progress in the north until the International Court of Justice (ICJ) provides its advisory opinion on Kosovo's independence, and this stalemate may continue if the ICJ opinion does not clearly favor Pristina. Regardless, at some point, we must address our unfinished business in the north, since Kosovo will never enjoy long-term stability and security as long as it remains an irredentist flashpoint and the hope of eventual partition remains on the agenda of some Serbs. This is likely to require a political showdown with Serbs there, and perhaps with Belgrade, which will carry potential security risks, risks that it will be easier to manage, perhaps even deter, with a large KFOR presence.

Capacities and Politics

16. (C/NF) There are other examples of the difficult issues that must be resolved, and where KFOR's continued robust presence provides a stabilizing role, such as 1) patrols along Kosovo's border, including the Kosovo-Serbia Border; and 2) protecting the nine major religious and cultural heritage sites currently guarded by KFOR. Both are related directly to the nine conditions KFOR must establish as part

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of preparations for drawdown to Gate 2 force levels, but getting both right involves more than the military tasks associated with handing over these responsibilities to the Kosovo Border Police (KBP) or Kosovo Police (KP). To begin with, both these Kosovo institutions must have the capacity (e.g., personnel, training, and equipment) to take on these new responsibilities without undercutting their capacity to meet their current responsibilities. As far as we are aware, there has not been a comprehensive needs assessment of KBP or KP regarding the implications for them of KFOR's drawdown, let alone preparation of plan to ensure those needs are met.

17. (C/NF) Regardless, there are also political challenges associated with "reducing framework tasks" or "unfixing from static sites" that must be addressed as part of KFOR's drawdown plans. Transitioning from KFOR to KP protection of Decani monastery will require, at a minimum, resolving politically sensitive disputes, including an intractable land dispute, between this moderate monastery and the municipality of Decan, an Albanian nationalist stronghold. In the case of Kosovo's border with Serbia, the replacement of KFOR soldiers with KBP could easily create as many problems as it solves. With armed Serbian and Kosovo forces patrolling roughly the same territory, any perceived violation of the unmarked, undelineated border -- and there are allegations of several such incidents every year -- could be viewed by either side as an incursion and could easily lead to shooting, including from a well-armed civilian population. A bilateral mechanism must be created to ensure that such incidents do not spin out of control, and transform isolated incidents into larger, broader problems. Addressing the security implications of these issues is further complicated by the fact that KFOR often works with the KBP and KP through EULEX rather than directly.

Waiting for EULEX

18. (C/NF) When we raise the security gaps that may arise from a premature drawdown (i.e., absent resolution of the underlying political problems that gave rise to the KFOR role in the first place), a common refrain from KFOR is that EULEX will fill them. EULEX officials we speak with do not see it this way. EULEX does not see itself assuming more

responsibility than monitoring and mentoring the KBP or KP, whether on the Kosovo-Serbia border or outside Decani monastery. This approach is consistent with what we have seen from EULEX since its deployment) limiting its activity to narrowly defined technical issues and studiously eschewing "political" issues. In addition, EULEX often defines the latter so broadly that it defaults to inaction when confronted with a security challenge. If KFOR defines an "ICP Rule-of-Law Mission functioning Kosovo-wide" narrowly, EULEX's presence meets this drawdown condition. However, the operative word is "functioning," and a thoughtful drawdown will require EULEX to assume greater responsibility and risk than it has thus far been willing to assume.

Nature Abhors a Vacuum: The Future of the KSF

¶9. (C/NF) As KFOR draws down, and eventually departs Kosovo, one institution to which Kosovo authorities will look to fill the security vacuum is the Kosovo Security Force (KSF). Though conceived as a force with largely civil response capabilities, the GOK will almost certainly move to transform the KSF into a more traditional military force once KFOR departs. Especially if the north of Kosovo continues to be a "special case," Pristina will argue that it needs a robust capacity to deter any temptation to reassert Belgrade's authority there as KFOR departs. At present, much of NATO's attention is properly devoted to helping the KSF, as currently conceived, move to full operational capability

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(FOC). We believe there should be a serious policy discussion about the KSF's long-term future and its role in Kosovo's security architecture. That debate, and whatever changes emerge from it, will take place with or without our guidance and participation. With our active involvement the inevitable worst excesses can be avoided, and any changes to the KSF made in a manner that contributes to the continued stability of the region.

Fewer Troops Requires Greater Intelligence Capabilities

¶10. (C/NF) Finally, as KFOR's numbers decrease, the need for accurate, timely intelligence will rise. The nine NATO conditions recognize this, but KFOR continues to face difficulties in filling key intelligence and reserve requirements (Ref B). The harsh truth is that without the appropriate intelligence assets, KFOR's Deterrent Presence force will be hard pressed to anticipate potential conflicts or to respond appropriately. If KFOR is handicapped in this fashion, it risks being reactive, rather than predictive. In Kosovo, where problems can spring up anywhere without warning and rapidly metastasize, a proactive intelligence approach that foresees the next flash point is essential for filling the gaps left by diminished resources. As we consider this issue and other drawdown decisions, we must also remember that Kosovo's history suggests that we cannot expect a serious security incident in one locality to remain isolated. Instead, it can rapidly spread, like a virus, and infect other parts of the country provoking further incidents. (Force levels also matter in such a scenario, but adequate warning of plans and intentions is even more critical.)

Comment

¶11. (C/NF) For ten years, KFOR has been the guarantor of a safe and secure environment in Kosovo. As it begins its drawdown, and its eventual departure, it must do so in a way that gives Kosovo its best chance to preserve a safe and secure environment now and in the future. Long-standing, seemingly intractable problems, like the reintegration of the north into Kosovo's institutions, should be addressed now while a KFOR at full strength is best positioned to deal with

the security incidents that could result. We can expect Kosovo Serb hardliners and/or Albanian nationalists to react as we attempt to settle them, but delaying action for the sake of the surface appearance of calm today will increase the potential for instability tomorrow, and constrain our ability to encourage durable solutions. Moreover, plans to shift KFOR's tasks to local actors or to other internationals cannot remain internal to KFOR. The capacity of successor organizations to handle these tasks must be assessed, their consent must be achieved, and the modalities of any shift must be agreed, in direct communication, without intermediaries. If successor organizations lack the capacity to assume tasks, such capacities must be developed, with KFOR taking an appropriate role. Failure to address these issues will ultimately serve only to slow the departure of KFOR troops and place the stability of Kosovo and the wider Western Balkans region unnecessarily at risk.

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